

with no options for funding Bosnia/Southwest Asia costs if the supplemental is delayed much longer.

I remain hopeful that quick action can be taken on the supplemental to preclude the disruptive impact to the Department's programs, especially those related to maintaining our readiness capability.

Sincerely,

BILL.

IMPORTANT ISSUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, as the only Independent in the House, let me raise a few issues which I consider to be terribly important but which unfortunately do not get discussed all that much here in the House Chamber. For a start, I think maybe the most important issue as a country that we have to wrestle with is to what degree is the United States of America today a vital democracy.

□ 2100

Sounds like an easy question. We have the right to vote. But, really, to what degree are our people involved in the political process? To what degree do people have faith and expectations of the political process?

Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleagues that just 4 years ago, in 1994, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. GINGRICH] and his friends took over the House of Representatives. We had an election in which 38 percent of the people voted. Sixty-two percent of the American people did not vote. And in that election and, today, we continue to have, by far, the lowest voter turnout of any industrialized nation on Earth.

Why is that? And why do we not discuss this issue? Why is it that millions of low-income people no longer participate in the political process, no longer believe that this Congress deals with issues or makes decisions which are relevant to their lives? Why is it that young people, in leaps and bounds, no longer pay attention to what goes on politically and do not believe that the political process is relevant to their lives? We do not talk about that issue, and I think it is important that we do.

And I think the answer is twofold. First of all, I think there is a great deal of discontent with the two major political parties, and I think that millions of Americans think that both political parties end up representing the wealthy and the powerful.

Second of all, even deeper than that, I think there is a growing belief that real power does not lie within the political process; that it almost does not matter who gets elected, which party controls Congress or State legislatures, but real power rests elsewhere.

In my State of Vermont and throughout this country we see large corporations saying, well, we would like to pay less in taxes within our city or within

the State, and if the lawmakers do not give us a tax break, we are going to move to another State or, more likely, we will move out of the United States of America. And what does a mayor or a Governor do or a legislature do under that scenario?

It does not matter what party controls the legislature. Essentially, what people understand is that real power rests with the people who have the money. And if the people who have the money are not pleased, do not get the tax breaks that they want, they are going to move elsewhere. When that happens, people say, why should I vote, it does not make any difference. Politicians really do not have the power.

So I would argue that this country faces a major political crisis. During the 1960's the Beatles were talking about what happened if they started a war and nobody came, nobody fought in the war. My fear is that the day will come where we are going to have an election and people will not come out to vote.

In 1994, we had 38 percent of the people voting in the national congressional elections. Last year, when President Clinton was reelected, I believe we had about 49 percent of the people voting. My guess is the next national congressional elections, in 1998, we will have about 35 percent of the people voting, and the voter turnout will go down and down.

It is up to this institution, the U.S. Congress, to stand up and try to understand what is going on and figure out a way that we can reinvigorate democracy.

We talk a lot about education. Everybody agrees, conservatives and progressives, on the importance of education. But if we are not talking about education for democracy, the right of people to control their own future, what are we talking about?

The second issue I briefly want to touch on is the issue of the booming economy. Mr. Speaker, we cannot open a newspaper without hearing about how fantastic the economy is doing. Some of our Wall Street friends here say, my God, it has never been so good. We cannot imagine it getting any better.

Yet, when we look at the fine print which appears on page 68, somewhere beneath the sports section, we find that the real wages last year for the American worker was up 3.8 percent when inflation was about 3 percent. And if we know that the low-wage workers got a boost because of raising the minimum wage and the upper income workers generally do better, what we conclude is the average middle-class worker continues to see a decline, a drop in his or her real wages. The economy is booming, but the average American worker continues to get poorer. That has been going on for 20 years.

So I would suggest when we talk about a booming economy, let us look at the middle class and the working

class of this country. And then, my friends, the economy is not booming so much.

A CLEAN DISASTER RELIEF BILL IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOB SCHAFER of Colorado). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. LAMPSON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMPSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my dismay over the continued mishandling of the disaster relief bill by the Republican leadership.

I represent a district along the gulf coast, and perhaps in several months, after a devastating hurricane, I will find myself in the same position as my colleagues, the gentleman from North Dakota [Mr. POMEROY] and the gentleman from South Dakota [Mr. THUNE]. I know that I would want disaster relief for my constituents in Galveston or Port Arthur or Texas City or Beaumont to be delivered as quickly as possible. Instead, my friends from the Dakotas have watched with what I can only imagine to be a combination of anger and disgust as certain factions within this body have played politics and political games with their aid.

I voted against adjourning for the Memorial Day recess so we could resolve this situation. I cannot imagine how my colleagues must have felt returning to sites of the flood devastation and trying to explain the holdup.

And yet, with great empathy for the flood victims, I felt that I had no choice but to vote against the disaster relief bill when it finally came to the floor.

The practice of attaching extraneous riders to disaster relief legislation may not be new, but as a freshman, it is the first time I had been forced and faced with such a dilemma. It is wrong. It should not be done.

Some of my colleagues have said it is the President playing politics. It is the House of Representatives playing politics and it is not right and should not be done.

I agree with Grand Forks, ND, Mayor Pat Owens, who said: "It is not fair to play with our people's lives and put amendments on to that bill."

The Governor of South Dakota, Bill Janklow, a Republican I might add, refused to put his name on a letter to the President asking him to sign the bill. A Fargo-Moorhead Forum editorial described Janklow's refusal as, "putting the interests of flood victims ahead of partisan considerations."

I appreciate that the people of this area understand why we have been forced to vote against supplying them the aid they need and deserve. A clean disaster aid bill for the victims of the flooding in the Midwest is weeks overdue. It is the right thing to do.

Today, after the President's veto, there is still no clean bill. Mr. Speaker, I must ask why. People's lives are in the balance.